DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 381 HE 024 438

AUTHOR Ihle, Elizabeth L.
TITLE Historical Perspectives on Women's Advancement in Higher Educational Administration.
PUB DATE 7 Apr 91
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Coeducation; College Presidents; Educational Administration; *Educational History; Educational Opportunities; Higher Education; Promotion (Occupational); Sex Bias; *Single Sex Colleges; Social History; *Women Administrators; *Womens Education

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a chronological description of the evolution of women's advancement in higher education, particularly in administrative capacities, and examines the establishment of the three types of institutions that came into being in order to meet women's educational needs: the single-sex college; the coordinate college; and the coeducational college. The paper begins with an account of the status of higher education for women in the United States in the 1820s and 1830s and goes on to describe how single-sex colleges began after the Civil War with Vassar (1865), Wellesley (1875), and Smith (1875). Bryn Mawr, founded in 1884, is credited with having the first feminist in higher education administration: Martha Carey Thomas, its dean and second president. The first coordinate colleges started with Columbia University's Barnard College in 1889, and Harvard's Radcliffe in 1894. Women deans and presidents of coordinate colleges, however, reported to male administrators. Oberlin College in Ohio is acknowledged as the first coeducational institution. Although all three types of colleges grew in the 20th century, the numerical growth of women administrators was limited. It is noted that until very recently, women administrators have had more opportunity to excel in women's colleges and coordinate institutions than in coeducational ones. Contains a 5-item bibliography. (GLR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED331381

Historical Perspectives on Women's Advancement in Higher Educational Administration

by

Elizabeth L. Ihle
James Madison University
Harrisonburg, VA 22807

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
Chicago, IL
April 7, 1991

HE024434

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Elizabeth L. Ihle

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The history of women administrators in colleges and universities in the United States is related to the history of women's access to higher education. Before women were admitted to colleges as students, the only avenue to men's colleges were through domestic employment like kitchen work or room cleaning.

Higher education in the United States for women was begun in the 1820s and 1830s by trio of women--largely because no man had yet thought that the enterprise of educating women in such a fashion was worthwhile. Emma Willard who established the Troy Female Seminary in New York in 1821 was the first to have a vision of an institution which would give women an academic education that would make them qualified to teach in any school in the country. Shortly afterwards in 1832 Catharine Beecher established the Hartford Seminary in Connecticut along the same lines and later wrote widely about the need for better educated wives and mothers. The final member of this trio of founding mothers of women's academic education was Mary Lyon, who in 1837 established Mount Holyoke Seminary in Masssachusetts. These women were more pragmatic than feminist. They saw a need for better training for women (largely to be more capable wives and mothers and, before marriage, teachers) and tried to fill this need because no men were interested in doing so. They served as the first female administrators in women's educational history and faced no glass ceiling in higher educational administration because no men thought the enterprise worthwhile.

After the Civil War, the first real colleges for women were

established. Their purposes differed little from those of the Troy Seminary or Mount Holyoke. Of the first three women's colleges, Vassar (1865), Wellesley (1875), and Smith (1875), only the third had a female benefactor, and only Wellesley opened its doors with a female president, Jane Howard, a Mount Holyoke graduate. She, however, served only in a nominal role as Henry Fowle Durant, the school's benefactor, really ran the school himself. (Solomon, 48).

The first feminist in higher education administration emerged from Bryn Mawr, founded in 1884 by Joseph Taylor, as a conservative Quaker institution to train mothers. However, its dean and second president, Martha Carey Thomas, changed its purpose to one of equalling the academic rigor of the best of men's universities and serves as the first effective woman in college administration. In 1899 she made headlines when she accused the venerated Harvard president Charles Eliot of having "sunspots on his brain" for his insistence that women needed a different education than that given to men. (Frankfort, 26)

At the same time as the first official women's colleges were founded, two other forms of women's higher education were emerging. The more conservative of the two was the coordinate college, a women's college run in conjunction with a men's college. Columbia University established Barnard College in 1889 for women and Harvard established Radcliffe in 1894 to accommodate the demands of the wives, sisters, and daughters of Harvard alumni who sought a Harvard education for themselves.

Other examples of the coordinate arrangement were Pembroke with Brown and Sophie Newcomb with Tulane.

Although the administrative structure of coordinate women's colleges varied, generally a coordinate college had separate classrooms and grounds but shared library, laboratory, and possibly athletic facilities with the men's institution. A female was likely to be hired as the dean or possibly president but reported to a male administrator in the adjoining male school. Some coordinate colleges hired their own faculty (who were sometimes moonlighting faculty from the adjoining men's institution), and a few shared faculty with the men's institution. Whatever the arrangement, in most cases the coordinate college remained heavily dependent upon the goodwill of male administrators in the men's institution.

The second alternative to single sex education was coeducation. Oberlin College in Ohio is rightly credited with being the first coeducation college in the United States with its policy to admit women to its secondary program from the college's founding in 1834 and to its collegiate program in 1837 (Fairchild, 177). A number of other small, private, midwestern institutions such as Olivet and Antioch followed Oberlin's lead. Although philosophical conviction of the equality of the sexes drove some or even the majority of these admission decisions, the need for enough students to make the institutions viable may have been an equally compelling reason for women's admission.

The first public institutions to adopt the coeducational

model were in the West and Midwest. The University of Washington opened as a coeducational institution in 1862 and apparently experienced little trouble. The University of Iowa was founded in 1856 became coeducational in 1860. The University of Wisconsin began coeducation in the 1860, and the University of Michigan in 1870. They were gradually followed by nearly all public state universities, with the University of Virginia being the last to admit women as undergraduates in 1971 under federal court order.

The move to coeducation virtually guaranteed that one administration position at each institution would be filled by a woman: that of a Dean of Women or a position with a different name but similar duties. An exception to the policy of the immediate creation of a dean of women's postion occurred at the University of Michigan which did not hire a woman to look after female students until 1896, twenty-six years after women were initially admitted, when pressure from the board of regents forced the appointment (Rosenburg, 117). Although this position gave women a toehold in university administration, chances of advancement from it were slim.

The twentieth century has witnessed the continuance and evolution of all three kinds of women's higher education--single sex, coordinate, and coeducational--but a somewhat limited growth in the numbers of women administrators.

Women's colleges continued to have the most women administrators, except in the South where men have usually held

presidencies. Roman Catholic women's colleges, established early in the century, often had female administrators largely because they were founded by sisterhoods and as late as 1984 still had the highest proportion of women presidents of any group of colleges or universities in the country (Office of Women in Higher Education, 1984). The first black woman college president was Mary Elizabeth Branch, a graduate of Virginia State College, who served as president of Tillotson College in Texas from 1930 until her death in 1944. During her tenure she made the all-women's school coeducation, largely as a means of increasing the college's enrollment and maintaining its viability. The lesser known of the two surviving black women's colleges, Bennett in North Carolina, appointed its first woman president, Wilma Player, in 1955 more than three decades before Spelman made history in 1987 with the appointment of Johnnetta Cole as its first woman president.

Coordinate colleges continued to thrive through the first half of the twentieth century, thus offering another outlet for the talents of female administrators. In the 1960s and 1970s the status of a number of these institutions changed, reflecting comptemporary demands for educational equity and more sexually integrated education. Radcliffe women began receiving a Harvard diploma in 1965, and now diplomas are awarded the Harvard-Radcliffe. Columbia did not actually admit women undergraduates until 1983. Despite these changes, women administrators continue to be highly sought at the historically coordinate institutions.

Women's admission as students to coeducational institutions in the twentieth century did not necessarily make women administrators--or faculty--welcome. At the University of California at Berkeley, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, who served as dean of women in the early 1900s, and Jessica Peixotto, a female faculty member, felt so much hostility from male colleagues that they never attended a faculty meeting (Antler, 55). As land grant institutions developed home economics programs, women were hired to direct them, but again the opportunity for advancement into upper levels of university administration were limited. Women faculty and administrators became the norm in departments such as nursing, public health, and home economics but were often excluded from mainstream disciplines and administrative responsibilities.

An obvious conclusion from this quick overview of the history of women in educational administration is that until very recently women administrators have had more opportunity to excel in women's colleges and coordinate institutions than in coeducational ones. The glass ceiling in educational administration has had definite gender limits.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Antler, J. The Educational Biography of Lucy Sprague Mitchell: A Case Study in the History of Women's Higher Education. In J. M. Faragher and F. Howe (Eds.), **Women in Higher Education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentiennial Symposia**. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988.

Fairchild, J. H. **Oberlin: The Colony and the College 1833-1883.** Oberlin, OH: E. J. Goodrich, 1883.

Frankfort, R. **Collegiate Women: Domesticity and Career in Turn-of-the-Century America.** New York: New York University Press, 1977.

Office of Women in Higher Education, American Council on Education, 1984, as cited by M. E. Tidball in Women's Colleges: Exceptional Conditions, Not Exceptional Talent Produce High Achievers. In C. S. Pearson, D. L. Shavlik, and J. G. Touchton (Eds.), **Educating the Majority: Women Challenge Tradition in Higher Education.** New York: American Council on Education and Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989.

Rosenberg, R. The Limits of Access: The History of Coeducation in America. In J. M. Faragher and F. Howe (Eds.),**Women in Higher Education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentiennial Symposia**. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988.

Solomon, B. M. **In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.